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Address of the Congregational Union in
Scotland on American Slavery-1840

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1840

ADDRESS

OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL UNION IN SCOTLAND

TO THEIR

FELLOW CHRISTIANS IN THE UNITED STATES,

ON THE SUBJECT OF

AMERICAN SLAVERY.

NEW-YORK:

**PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN AND FOREIGN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY,
NO. 131 NASSAU STREET.**

1840.

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ADDRESS

TO

CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA.

To our fellow-Christians in America, the Address of the Annual Meeting of the Congregational Union of Scotland, held in Dundee, on Thursday, the sixteenth day of April, 1840.

OUR BELOVED BRETHREN,—In fulfilment of a resolution passed at the annual meeting of the Congregational Union of Scotland, held in Dundee on the 16th day of April, 1840, we again address you. We feel the utmost freedom in renewing our communications with you on the painful subject of slavery because we are more than ever satisfied of the truth and urgency of the reasons against the system of slavery, which have been embodied in the addresses, emanating from the same body, for several years successively: because in pressing our views upon your careful and devout consideration, we are using a right which our common profession of Christianity gives; and especially because the representations of former years have been received and acknowledged by some Christian communities amongst you, in a manner so kind and fraternal, that it would be as ungenerous as unwise in us, not to renew these tokens of our fervent interest in your spiritual welfare and religious reputation.

It gives us the highest pleasure to know that so many of you are convinced, as well as ourselves, of the sin of slaveholding and slave-dealing; and that you are moved, in consequence, to use the most strenuous and persevering exertions to cleanse the land from its abominations. Brethren, our hearts are entirely with you,—our prayer is, that the number of such may be “greatly multiplied,” that your counsels may be wise, your zeal untiring, your efforts united and

ADDRESS.

effective, your success speedy and abundant. It is a much more grateful task to concur and congratulate, than to remonstrate and reprove. We would rather be called to stimulate our American brethren, when they were already active—to touch responsive chords in the bosoms of those who were “willing of themselves”—to strengthen the firm purposes of sincere and vigorous godliness, than to complain of sinful apathy, or to arouse from inactivity, which implicates them in the crime which they do not denounce. It is with disappointment, and distress, and shame, to which you can perhaps scarcely give credence, that we look at so large a body of professing Christians in your country at this moment consigning their fellow-men, some of whom are professors of the same faith with themselves, to the wrongs and indignities of hopeless bondage; whilst many more, not slaveholders or slave dealers, are the strenuous defenders of the existing system; and many more, protecting and fostering it by their connivance and countenance. The slave system, as it exists in your country, is awfully comprehensive of evil; the crimes which feed and sustain it are nameless for their enormity; the vices which it nourishes in its various departments are wide-spreading and execrable; the wrongs which it inflicts on the body, mind, and spirit of the bondsman (and of him who holds him in bondage) are incalculable; and our amazement exceeds utterance, that any professing the name of Christ should not see and own the system to be throughout, intensely criminal,—should not, at every hazard and sacrifice, escape from the contact and contamination of such a physical and moral pestilence,—should not, as by the instinctive and irresistible impulses of his nature, devote himself to denounce and destroy it. We cannot but think, that if our brethren would calmly examine the system, by the light of Holy Scripture (not to speak of natural reason and equity,) and deliver themselves from the delusive subtleties of abstract speculation, they must surely conclude, that they could not, in consistency with their Christian profession, without a dishonorable stain on their character, without a withering blight upon vital religion, and a most manifest bounty upon worldliness and infidelity, actively support, or in any way countenance, such a system. With what truth can they hold forth the gospel of Jesus Christ, as a system of which the features, and withal the fruits, are righteousness, mercy, love, and purity, if it can cover under its name, or shelter by its doctrines, a system, of which oppression, and cruelty, and crime, are “the spirit and power?”

To hold their fellow-men in bondage, as absolute saleable property, is a sin in any; and can the professed followers of Christ, who bow to his sceptre, venerate his laws, and have learned at his feet the spirit of meekness and benevolence which he breathed and inculcated, put their hand to this work of wickedness? Experience and observation teach us the great power of prejudice in biasing the judgment; and for this, brethren, we would allow amply in your favor; but, can you hide from yourselves, that in countenancing and supporting slavery, you are living in sin? Are you not assured, if you reflect, that while this sin is cherished, your souls must be blasted and withered; that insincerity must be established, as if by a law, in the hearts of the worshipers of that God who will have men to "lift up holy hands" unto him; and that the godliness which will survive such habitual quenching of the Spirit, must be transformed into the "spirit of bondage"—the very drudgery and dregs of spiritual life?

You allow it, brethren, to be a truth in morals, that our consciences may be charged with the guilt of practices in which we do not actively or directly share, if these practices are sheltered by our countenance, and protected by our silence respecting their enormity, or our inactivity towards their restraint and abolition. On this principle, if you leave any legitimate means unemployed, or any practicable or probable methods unattempted, for removing this disgraceful and cruel system from your borders, you become its patrons and protectors. It is possible that we, at this distance, may not be fully acquainted with all the difficulties of your position as a nation, especially of the several States in relation to the Union; and it is possible we may have underrated these difficulties.* We are not conscious of wronging you even in thought. But, taking these obstacles at their highest estimate, unless they forbid any movement whatever on your part in this great enterprise of mercy, you are bound, as men and as Christians, to make what exertions you can. If you have not full liberty of action, it is yours to use the liberty you have. You have not every advantage desirable or possible for contending with this gigantic evil; but great

* In his speech, at Edinburgh, Mr. Birney said, in allusion to this Remonstrance,—“The address is a capital production, with the exception of one single point. It says that there may be difficulties in the way of emancipation, with which they (the addressers) were not acquainted. The fact is, there are no difficulties whatever. [Hear.] The only difficulty is the want of will.” [Laughter.]

advantages may be procured and created. Inactivity cannot be guiltless until you have done "whatsoever your hand findeth to do." Brethren! "necessity is upon you," and, harsh as the judgment may seem, we cannot see our escape from the obligation, but by dishonoring or abjuring your most holy faith.

A most urgent reason for immediate and uncompromising hostility to the system of slavery, arises from the fact, that thousands who are members of your churches are the active agents of its unmitigated horrors. A most injurious and fatal element is thus diffused throughout the religious community: "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Association tends to bring men to a common level. In the soil of such hearts godliness cannot flourish. The other portion of the church must, by communion with them, be deteriorated and corrupted. The tone of spiritual principle and sentiment is lowered. The whole church is brought into fearful danger and certain injury. There is, of necessity, a reserve in the general heart in favor of notorious injustice and iniquity,—sound spiritual health is therefore impossible. And by so much as the character of the church is stained, its influence for good is diminished. Men are compelled, despite of every contrary inclination, to view with suspicion even the religious activity and enterprise of a community thus seriously vitiated;—what would in other circumstances be regarded as the unequivocal indications of spiritual prosperity are distrusted, and with apparent reason, as if they were the uncandid attempt (not unknown in the history of the church) to cover the neglect of one duty by counterbalancing zeal in the discharge of another. Bethink you, dear brethren, of these consequences, which your own spiritual sympathies will set before you, we trust, with greater effect than the most elaborate portraiture by us. If vital godliness decay in the church; if the fountain of spiritual health be poisoned, whence are to come the streams to refresh and beautify the thirsty land, and change the wilderness into a fruitful field? There is but one way in which such a dreadful calamity may be averted:—"Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before the eyes of the Lord; cease to do evil; learn to do well, *seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*"

But such a change we cannot anticipate while the great body of you admit and cherish so inveterately the prejudice against color. This prejudice, of which the friends of justice and humanity complain, as

one of the main supports of the slave-system, and one of the greatest barriers to their successful struggle with it, we can think of, only with amazement approaching to incredulity. It is a weakness we can scarcely allow in you. It is an infringement of right reason quite unworthy of an enlightened people. It is based on a falsehood, to which facts, palpable as noon-day, are giving contradiction; for the persons who are despised for a peculiarity merely corporeal and superficial, are the owners of the high faculties of man; and many of them, by the cultivation of their mind and the virtue of their character, may be an honor to any country, and an ornament to any society. It is vexatious injustice to punish as a crime what none can with any show of reason allege to bear that character. It is an indication of impiety; for it pours contempt on the work of God, and quarrels with the decrees of his providence.

If it were necessary to extend our reasons further for the course to which we affectionately invite you, we should bid you cast your eyes on your rising youth, the pride of the nation, the hope of the church. This stain on your name and religion cannot escape their observant eye. They will very likely be perplexed and confounded by the manifest contrariety of your principles and your practices. When they see a system so "earthly, sensual, devilish," supported by some of you, countenanced by others, tenderly dealt with by most, they will very likely cast the weight of your example into the scale of their worldly interests,—perhaps thenceforward despise the authority, or deny the origin, and certainly corrupt the quality of the religion you would teach them; and when your eyes see, or your foreboding hearts shall prophetically picture to you, your posterity denying the power of that religion whose form they retain, or in proud and presumptuous infidelity defying Heaven in their courses—conscience may say to you, in embittered accents: "Have ye not procured these things for yourselves?"

Nothing seems more truly calculated to gratify the cravings of the scoffer at our holy religion, than your countenance of slavery. The gainsayer takes his stand upon your practices, and you are not the defenders of the faith than can weaken his position. You may therefore reasonably question whether your connection with slavery is not doing greater injury to religion than the most combined and self-denying efforts can do for its defence and propagation.

Brethren, what shall we say more? We might appeal to *your reason as men*: disown the great practical untruth to which you have

given currency under your hand, that man may lawfully hold his fellow in bondage,—may give to man the place of the brute, and change the living responsible agent into a mere chattel!—*to your wisdom as politicians*: attempt not to bind your society together with that which now weakens, and may ultimately dissolve and desolate your nation: *to your consistency as Americans*—the friends and advocates of freedom: whilst you exult in liberty and independence, lift your foot from the neck of your prostrate brother; belie not in your acts the boastings of your lips; turn not the lofty notes of freedom into the croakings of hypocritical selfishness:—*to your sincerity as patriots*: foment not these smouldering and scarcely hidden fires that may suddenly burst forth to desolate your altars and your homes:—*to the tender sympathies of your domestic and relative affection*: do not wrench and sacrifice those affections in others, which constitute the honor, and happiness, and excellence of your own being: but we appeal especially, and with lively hope, to you, *as the disciples of Jesus Christ*. If your Lord's commands are binding on you, you will "do justly and love mercy"—you will "do good to all men as you have opportunity," and at least render to them that which is "just and equal"—you will "owe no man anything," and therefore not withhold from him his dearest rights and pleasures. If your Lord's spirit be attractive to you, and you "know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," you will cultivate "the mind which was also" in Him; you will "condescend to men of low estate;" you will "look, not every man to his own things, but every man also on the things of others." If your Lord's love constrain you, you will "glory in his cross," and thus be crucified to the world, and the world unto you;" you will not suffer worldly advantage nor any other idol to dispute his supremacy, or restrict his honor and obedience as the Lord of the heart and conscience. If your Lord's cause be dear to you, you will "hold forth the word of life;" you will, by "manifestation of the truth," commend it "to every man's conscience in the sight of God," and by embodying in your life the equitable and benevolent spirit of the gospel, give no "occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."

To those bearing the Christian name, engaged in slaveholding, we say, with all fidelity and affection,—Review once more the first principles of the gospel. Own, as you surely must perceive, the sinfulness of the traffic in the pilfered rights and liberties of your fellow-men. Wash your hands at once from the dishonorable defilement. Deliver

your consciences from the crushing load of guilt. Break the fetters in which your souls have until now been held. Enter into the full liberty of Christ, which consists in honoring his authority and laws. Suffering and loss may await you; but were it martyrdom itself, the spirits of sainted martyrs invite you to the sacrifice; Christ's promises will sustain you—his shadow will cover you—and his unchanging favor be your everlasting crown.

Let those whose hands are not engaged in the work of oppression, keep their hearts free from contamination. The guilt of those whom you own as brethren, should open up the fountain of sorrow in your spirits. By so much as they come "short of the glory of God," be it yours to stand forth with "garments unspotted," as witnesses, for the righteousness, and benevolence, and purity, which the gospel inculcates. Suffer not sin upon your brethren, or you make it your own. Abjure all maxims of worldly policy, when they would set aside the authority of Christ. Deliver your souls at once and forever from co-partnery in crime. Inactivity is guilt in the sight of your Divine Master. Compromise is treachery to his interests. Timidity is distrust and disaffection. Abandonment of the cause of the poor and oppressed, is apostacy from your high and holy calling. "Be strong, quit you like men."

Let our colored brethren who have obtained the blessings of freedom bear, with the meekness of Christ, the wrongs to which they are still subjected. You, dear brethren, need no stimulus from us to hate slavery, and hunt the loathsome system to the death. "Go, and the Lord be with you." You will repress, however, as befits you, every excess of natural indignation at the remembrance of your own, or the sight of your brother's injuries, lest natural passion should hurry you into word or act that would embitter your spirit, defile your conscience, and ultimately injure your great and godlike enterprise.

Our dearly beloved brethren who are still in bonds,—we would remember you as bound with you. We would mingle our tears of sympathy with your tears of suffering. But you have a fuller and more efficient sympathy than ours. Ye are the Lord's freedmen. Your souls exult in the liberty that sanctifies and expands the immortal spirit. In all your sufferings the eye of Heaven beams on you with pity. The Lord puts your tears into his bottle. "For your shame ye shall have double." "In your patience," dear brethren, "possess ye your souls." In the furnace of suffering your heavenly Lord is brightening and beautifying your spirits to adorn his diadem of glory.

Finally, beloved brethren, our "heart's desire and prayer to God" for all of you is, that "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report," you may "think on" and "do;" and that "the God of peace may be with you."

Subscribed in the name of the Meeting,

RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

DAVID RUSSELL, D.D.

JAMES R. CAMPBELL, M.A.

A correct copy of the original in my possession.

JAMES R. CAMPBELL, M. A.

APPENDIX.

THE Address contained in the preceding pages, was recently forwarded to the editors of our principal religious and anti-slavery periodicals, with a view to its publication throughout the country, and was accompanied by the following note:—

Montrose, Scotland, 14th October, 1840.

MY DEAR SIR,—You will greatly oblige the esteemed brethren with whom my name is associated, and myself, and the Christian body whom we represent, by giving circulation to the enclosed address in your publication. Our only desire is to set our brethren who differ from us right on this momentous subject. We trust our effort is made in the spirit of meekness and of Christ.

I am, my dear sir,

Yours very faithfully,

(Signed) JAMES R. CAMPBELL, M. A.

Although it has already appeared in several newspapers it has been thought best to publish it in pamphlet form, to be sold at a low rate, in hopes that the friends of the Redeemer will purchase for distribution, and see that it is put into the hands of every man of intelligent piety in the land. Every minister of the gospel, every officer of a church, every teacher of youth, every student of theology, every superintendent and teacher of a Sabbath school—indeed, every professor of religion, of every denomination, should be put in possession of a copy of this most seasonable and admirable Address. It proceeds from a body of evangelical and devoted ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ, through a committee “whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches,” and is written in a catholic and affectionate, though faithful spirit. These Christian fathers and brethren speak to us the language of TRUTH, on a subject of transcendent importance to the whole human family, and especially to the churches and people of this country. Let us not refuse to listen to them with candor and respect because they are foreigners, and therefore, as some absurdly pretend, are not well acquainted with the system of slavery, and its unhallowed connection with the ministry and churches, in the United States. Rather let their faithful address be received with meekness,

with gratitude, with self-application, with contrition, with confession and reformation. "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head."

After so much discussion, and intercourse, the ministers of the gospel in Great Britain, at this day, well understand the subject of *American Slavery as it is*. They read our publications, they know the proceedings of our ecclesiastical bodies, they see and converse with many of our distinguished men, on both sides of the question, when they visit Europe, and are advised, by many faithful witnesses, of the state of things in this country. Is it not natural, then, that they should judge of the views and feelings of the great body of the American clergy, and private Christians, with respect to American slavery, especially after so much light has been thrown upon the subject, by **THEIR** acts? When they look into the religious periodicals of this country, they find that although, "in the abstract," slavery is far from being approved, yet there is usually a studious avoidance of anti-slavery intelligence and of discussion on the unpopular subject; when they read the proceedings of most of our ecclesiastical bodies, they perceive that the question is an unwelcome theme, and is disposed of by some evasive process; when any of them listen to the preaching and prayers in our churches and Christian families, they seldom, it is believed, hear slavery alluded to as a sin, the system of slave-holding mentioned as a foul blot upon the nation, the slave commended to the protection of the Savior, or the cause of emancipation spread before the throne of grace; when they visit our Sabbath schools or sanctuaries they perceive that people of color are, with very few exceptions, placed apart, and separated from the whites, even at the table of the Lord; and notwithstanding the sympathy that is often professed towards the oppressed and our free colored countrymen, they see but few ministers of the gospel, or private Christians, comparatively, who enter into the great subject of emancipation, with a deep concern for the honor and welfare of the church and the nation, as connected with this soul-destroying sin. It is by this lukewarmness, fearfulness, silence and evasive conduct, that most of our clergy and churches are supporting the system of slavery in this land, and the enlightened ministers of the gospel and laymen across the Atlantic know it, and knowing, deplore and remonstrate against it. If then we desire to be free from the charge of favoring the existence and perpetuity of American, or as it is sometimes absurdly called "African," Slavery in our midst, it behooves us to listen, with self-application, to the honest and faithful rebukes of our transatlantic fellow-Christians, to humble ourselves before the heart-searching and rein-trying God, and to do all in our power to deliver our churches and the nation from the accursed system that binds in fetters of iron nearly one-fifth of all the men, women and children in this country, lessens the confidence of foreign Christians in our *sincerity and piety*, and endangers the spiritual and political welfare of *the whole people*.



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